

*Section 5 —*  
*Education Issues —*  
**Academic Program Planning**

**The University of North Carolina**

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# ACADEMIC PROGRAM PLANNING THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA

## ISSUE STATEMENT

The Government Performance Audit Committee (GPAC) is concerned that degree programs of The University of North Carolina (UNC) may include unnecessarily redundant programs and that planning procedures have not been sufficient to prevent program proliferation. Therefore, it requested a study of UNC's academic program planning process. The objectives of this study were to assess the adequacy of the planning process in screening unneeded programs and to identify the extent of current redundancy that might be eliminated to conserve resources.

The first section below provides descriptive background information about the history, current design, and results of UNC's planning process. Findings and recommendations sections follow. Several supporting suggestions are provided in a section on implementation considerations.

## BACKGROUND

### History

Until 1955, initiation of new degree programs was an institutional prerogative of independently governed colleges and universities, subject only to the institution's ability to obtain funding from the General Assembly or elsewhere. Other than the General Assembly itself, no central higher education planning authority existed. In 1955, the General Assembly established the State Board of Higher Education to "allot the functions and activities" of the public colleges and universities. However, the General Assembly did not give this Board authority to carry out its mission and did not restrict its own direct oversight of the colleges and universities.<sup>1</sup> It essentially governed the institutions and authorized all of them, except the North Carolina School of the Arts, to offer degrees up through the doctoral level. In 1969, the General Assembly declared every public senior institution in the State a "university" and adopted more rigorous review and screening procedures.

Major change came in 1971 when the General Assembly passed the Higher Education Organization Act which established a unified university system, combining six institutions that were part of the original University and the nine regional universities. The North Carolina School of the Arts was added to the System at another time.

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<sup>1</sup>*Long-Range Planning: 1986-1991*, The University of North Carolina Board of Governors, November 1987, p. 3.

The Act also restructured the Board of Higher Education as the Board of Governors, empowered it to "govern the constituent institutions," and set forth three major objectives, to:

- Improve the quality of higher education
- Extend the benefits of higher education
- Achieve a more economical use of State resources

The newly established Board of Governors held its first meeting in July 1972. In August, it imposed a two-year moratorium on new programs and required each institution to prepare a five-year plan. While the moratorium was in place, the Board directed its staff to conduct an inventory of programs, identify statewide program needs, establish procedures for rational and comprehensive planning, analyze and project enrollment, develop a library improvement plan, and develop a plan for further racial integration.

The Board adopted the first statewide five-year plan in 1976. It was a milestone that provided the framework for subsequent analysis and planning as it:

- Defined the role, scope, and mission of each of the constituent institutions
- Established basic policies and procedures for academic program planning and development
- Called for the review and evaluation of existing degree programs
- Set general policies and directions for UNC

The Board revised the plan in 1977 and 1978 and since then has revised it biennially in alternate years from the development of the budget request until 1988. UNC did not complete long-range plans in 1988 and 1990 because it undertook instead a comprehensive mission review before the 1988 plan was completed.

### **Planning for New Programs**

Responsibility for proposing new programs resides initially with the institutions. The Board of Governors requires institutions to submit requests for new programs as part of biennial updates to the long-range plan so that UNC General Administration can compare and evaluate the requests. The Board makes exceptions and considers requests for new programs outside the prescribed planning cycle only under special circumstances, for example, if the new program will be funded from non-state revenues and there is demonstrable need.

Planning for new programs occurs in two phases:

1. Request for authorization to **plan** a new degree program
2. Request for authorization to **establish** a new degree program

**Phase 1 – Request for Authorization to Plan a New Degree Program.** The institution completes and submits to the President of UNC a request for authorization to plan a new degree program, which must:

- Describe the proposed program including educational objectives, relationship to mission and existing programs, and special considerations
- List all other public and private institutions in North Carolina currently operating similar programs
- Project current and future program demand
- Detail the planning procedures to be used
- Identify the sources of funds, including private, state, and enrollment increase funds

The burden is on the institution to demonstrate need for the program. The program must be within the institution's mission and must complement existing programs. The Board gives priority to strengthening current programs over adding new programs. Recommending programs for elimination strengthens an institution's request for a new program.

The President delegates authority for reviewing requests to UNC General Administration's Office of Planning. The Office of Planning uses the following checklist for reviewing planning authorization requests:

- Is the proposed program consistent with the current mission of the institution?
- Is there a significant and legitimate need for the program? If the program is not consistent with the current mission, is the need sufficiently great to justify a modification of the institution's mission?
- Would the proposed program be closely related to existing programs at the institution? Would it build on strength? Would it reinforce and strengthen, or drain resources from current programs?
- What have been the enrollments and productivity of similar or related programs at that institution and elsewhere in recent years?

- Would establishment of the program require substantial additional resources?
- What has been the institution's track record in planning and developing new degree programs? How many previous planning authorizations are not yet implemented?
- Would initiation of the program be likely to have a positive or negative effect on further racial integration of the institution?

The Office of Planning forwards requests it approves to the Board of Governors' Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs which authorizes or rejects the request to plan. If authorized, the institution has 24 months in which to plan the program and submit a "request to establish" a new degree program. The institution provides a status report at 12 months. At 24 months, if the Board has not received the request to establish, it reauthorizes planning or lets the planning authorization expire.

**Phase 2 – Request to Establish a New Degree Program.** Within the 24 months, the institution completes and submits to UNC General Administration a request to establish a new degree program, which must:

- **Describe the program**, including indicating how the new program differs from current UNC programs and, if it duplicates a current program, why it is necessary or justified
- **Justify the program and project enrollment for the first four years of operation**, including relating the program to institutional mission; overall state plans for higher education and service programs; student demand; and, for graduate, first professional, and baccalaureate programs, workforce needs
- **Describe program requirements and curriculum**
- **List faculty requirements**, including sources of new funds for new faculty
- **Describe impact on the library**, including any required improvements
- **Describe facilities, equipment, and computer support requirements**, including sources of funding for new facilities and equipment
- **Describe how the new program will be administered**, including listing the responsibilities of each department, division, school, or college affected
- **List all accrediting agencies**
- **List expansion or improvements required in supporting disciplines**

- **Estimate additional costs required and sources of funding**, including reallocation of current resources, enrollment increase funds, federal or other funds, and new state allocations
- **Present an evaluation plan**, including the expected number of graduates (productivity), names of potential external reviewers, and a plan and schedule for evaluating the first five years of program operation

UNC General Administration uses external consultants to review requests; consultants recommend acceptance or rejection of the new program. The President provides recommendations to the Board's Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs and, if the program requires new state funds, to the Board's Budget Committee. The committees make their reports to the full Board, which accepts or rejects the proposed programs.

### **Discontinuing Current Programs**

UNC General Administration identifies programs for discontinuation in two ways:

- Periodic systemwide program reviews
- Biennial productivity reviews

**Systemwide Program Reviews.** The stated objectives of these reviews are to:

- Identify the State's needs for qualified professionals
- Strengthen existing programs or add new programs to meet identified needs
- Discontinue programs that are not sufficiently strong in quality or for which there is not apparent need

Even though a principal focus of the reviews is to improve the quality of existing programs, several have resulted in program additions and discontinuations, because state needs are an important factor.

In these reviews, the Board of Governors evaluates program performance in terms of need, productivity, quality, and cost for the past five years. If the review finds that a program is of poor quality, General Administration asks the institution to submit a plan to improve the program within 12 months. The plan must include evaluation criteria and targets. If the institution cannot meet the objectives in the plan, the program is cancelled.

Since its inception as a governing body, the Board of Governors has conducted systemwide program reviews of the following:

- Nursing education (1975 and 1980)

- Teacher education (1976–78)
- Health professions education (excluding medicine, dentistry, and nursing) (1978)
- Engineering (1978 and 1982)
- Home economics (1979–80)
- Industrial arts, technology, and engineering technology (1980–81)
- Public affairs and services (1981–82)
- Business and management (1984–85)
- Physical sciences (1988–89)
- Mathematics, computer and information sciences, and statistics (1990–91)

Stated objectives of the reviews emphasize the State's needs for professionals. Professional and technical programs relate more directly to workforce needs and frequently involve some form of professional certification. Thus, the Board logically has focused many of the first major systemwide program reviews it has conducted on professional programs rather than on traditional arts and sciences.

According to General Administration, the combined systemwide reviews have covered programs that together enroll two-thirds of the upper division undergraduate student majors within the University. The new long-range plan calls for review and evaluation of all degree programs in communications and foreign languages.

**Biennial Productivity Reviews.** UNC General Administration conducts biennial reviews of low productivity programs to identify candidates for elimination. UNC General Administration and all institutional academic affairs staff receive annual reports that list fall enrollment and degrees conferred by program and institution for each of the past ten years. General Administration uses the data to identify programs that meet any of the following low productivity criteria:

- Enrollment
  - enrolled no students in the last year
  - enrolled fewer than two students in the last two years
  - averaged fewer than two students in the past ten years
- Degrees
  - conferred no degrees in the last year

- conferred only one degree in the last two years
- averaged fewer than one degree in the past ten years

UNC General Administration sends a summary form for each low productivity program to the institutions, requiring the institution to:

- Make and explain any corrections to the data
- Explain whether there are courses that could be eliminated or offered less frequently if the program were discontinued
- Recommend discontinuation or continuation of the program

Recommendations for discontinuation must include a recommended date. Recommendations for continuation must include an explanation of past enrollments, expectations for future enrollments, and the importance of the program to the educational mission of the institution. For example, low productivity programs that are integral to the arts and sciences curriculum will not be eliminated.

If the institution recommends continuation of the program, General Administration examines additional criteria to determine whether or not to approve continuation. Those programs having some combination of declining productivity, poor program quality, high costs, low occupational demand, and limited centrality to institutional mission are designated for elimination.

As an incentive, General Administration is more likely to approve requests for planning new programs if the new program is to be funded by program eliminations. Academic development procedures state that:

"State allocations for new academic programs will continue to be limited. Consequently, institutions should plan to establish any new degree programs and degree program tracks using primarily existing resources and/or funds generated by projected enrollment increases."

The Board conducted its last productivity review in 1991. The instruction letter to institutions for the 1991 review stated "You have called attention to the problems you are facing in maintaining your current array of program offerings in the light of the cuts made in your operating budgets. This is an opportunity to consider some needed changes."

The productivity review for the 1992–1997 long-range plan identified 185 programs of which 42, or 23 percent, were discontinued. Savings associated with program eliminations could not be determined as these data are not reported to UNC General Administration; institutions redirect positions and other savings to other higher priority programs.



## Recent Comprehensive Mission Review

In early 1990, President Spangler and the Board of Governors called for a comprehensive review and reassessment of the missions of each UNC constituent institution. The mission review was a major change in two respects:

- It was the first time institutions were asked to plan for a ten-year horizon. All prior long-range plans had a five-year horizon.
- It was the first time since the first long-range plan in 1976 that the institutions were asked to reassess their missions.

The President and the Board asked institutions to review current academic offerings, research and service functions, administrative structure, and enrollment patterns and to develop a plan for the coming decade to prepare for the year 2000. Institutions submitted their plans in 1991 and the President asked four distinguished consultants to review them. The consultants presented recommendations to the President and the Board in November 1991. After reviews by the President and the Committee on Educational Planning, Policies, and Programs, the Board approved the Committee's report in March 1992 and asked the President to prepare a new long-range plan for the period 1992 to 1997. The new long-range plan is the "most extensive and significant revision" of the original 1976 long-range plan.<sup>2</sup>

The 1992-1997 long-range plan reclassified two of the institutions' missions and designates planned program changes as shown in Exhibit 1.

<b>EXHIBIT 1</b> <b>The University of North Carolina</b> <b>Summary of Planned Program Changes: 1992-1997</b>					
<b>Action</b>	<b>Baccalaureate</b>	<b>Masters</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Doctoral</b>	<b>Total</b>
Planning Authorizations	18	23	1	9	51
Planning Reconfirmations	8	11	0	3	22
Discontinuations	14	6	20	3	43

## FINDINGS

In this study, comparative analysis is based on 11 states selected as a peer group because of characteristics of public education in common with North Carolina. These are the same states

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<sup>2</sup>*Long-Range Planning: 1992-97*, The University of North Carolina Board of Governors, 1992, p. 1.

as those used in the study on tuition and fees.<sup>3</sup> For this study, an original data collection effort, in the form of a telephone survey, was conducted. Not all 11 states were able to provide information on some issues. Therefore, various exhibits list information for fewer than 11 peers.

**Finding 1: UNC planning procedures instituted since 1976 have been effective in preventing excessive proliferation of new programs.**

As Exhibit 2 shows, only 25 percent of requests for authorization to plan new programs are approved. The exceptionally large number of new program requests in the 1992–1997 long-range plan resulted from two factors: (1) the comprehensive mission review begun in 1990 with a ten-year, rather than five-year, planning horizon, and (2) pent-up program demand resulting from the 1981 consent decree which limited the number of new programs at historically white institutions to a ratio of new programs at historically black institutions. The plan in the consent decree, which expired in 1986 but which the Board of Governors continued to implement through 1988, limited planning for new programs at historically white institutions.

<b>EXHIBIT 2</b> <b>The University of North Carolina</b> <b>Planning Authorizations Approved</b>		
Long-Range Plan	Requests for Planning Authorization	Planning Authorizations Approved
1976–81	300	55
1977–82	110	30
1978–83	72	26
1980–85	89	31
1982–87	61	19
1984–89	76	30
1986–91	27	12
1992–97	<u>273</u>	<u>51</u>
Totals	1,008	254

Some of the UNC System's more expensive investments are long-established doctoral programs at the two oldest doctoral/research universities, UNC–Chapel Hill (UNC–CH) and North Carolina State University (NCSU). Since 1976, within the framework of the planning

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<sup>3</sup>Peer states are: California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

process, the Board has been relatively successful in maintaining mission distinctions as much as possible between these two institutions by containing proliferation of duplicative doctoral programs. For example, NCSU's requests for a doctoral program in English (letters) have been denied. Also, the Board of Governors and the institutions are working to consolidate or share responsibilities for marine sciences between those two institutions and UNC-Wilmington (UNC-W).

Requests to authorize planning do not include program cost estimates and therefore total savings cannot be determined for rejected requests. However, some of the programs which the Board did not authorize would have been costly, including requests for new programs in law, pharmacy, engineering, and optometry. For this reason, although dollar amounts cannot be identified, the program screening decisions must represent a very significant degree of cost avoidance savings.

**Finding 2: Most programs that receive authorization to plan eventually are established.**

Of the 254 programs for which planning has been authorized:

- 162 (64 percent) have been established
- 70 (28 percent) are still being planned
- 3 (1 percent) are planned and awaiting funding

Only 19 (7 percent) of planning authorizations have been withdrawn.

**Finding 3: UNC is within peer state norms by having a new program approval process and in the nature of the process.**

Exhibit 3, on the following page, displays survey findings for nine of 11 peer states. All of these have a central review process for new programs. They also employ many of the procedures UNC uses: a two-step program approval process, a long-range planning process, and external consultants.

**Finding 4: Many peer states conduct some form of systemwide program review of existing programs on a regular schedule.**

As shown also in Exhibit 3, many of UNC's peer systems also conduct some form of systemwide program review on a regular basis. Of the nine that provided data, the only ones that do not are Georgia, which reviews programs only as problems arise and Virginia, which assigns responsibility for qualitative reviews to the institutions themselves. Maryland just initiated its systemwide program review.

**Finding 5: UNC has been relatively more effective in preventing proliferation of new programs than in eliminating low priority existing programs.**

**EXHIBIT 3**  
**Established Policies and Processes for Reviews**  
**of New and Existing Programs**  
**Peer States**

<b>State</b>	<b>Central Review of New Programs</b>	<b>Systemwide Reviews of Existing Programs</b>
Florida	Yes	Conducts reviews of five programs every year. Began the program 17 years ago.
Georgia	Yes	Conducts reviews of programs only as problems are identified. Reviews are very infrequent.
Illinois	Yes	Reviews every program on a five-year cycle.
Indiana	Yes	Conducts periodic "comprehensive" reviews of selected programs across institutions every two years.
Maryland	Yes	Just initiated a program review.
Ohio	N/A	(Representatives unavailable for interview)
Texas	Yes	Recently revised procedures for program reviews.
Virginia	Yes	Conducts "quantitative" reviews of all programs every two years. Assigns responsibility for qualitative reviews to institutions.
Wisconsin	Yes	Conducts "lateral" reviews of programs across system.

**Note:** Data were obtained for 9 of an initial set of 11 states.

**Source:** Telephone interviews with state higher education representatives, November and December, 1992

Since the 1976-1981 plan, 135 programs have been eliminated; 162 new programs have been implemented; and 254 programs have been authorized for planning (Exhibit 4). As stated above, most programs that receive planning authorization eventually are implemented.

Overall, approximately four programs have been eliminated for every five that have been implemented. However, almost twice as many planning authorizations have been approved than programs have been discontinued.

The Board of Governors realizes that resources will be scarce for the foreseeable future and, therefore, included criteria for the reviews (productivity, quality, cost, occupational demand, and level of centrality to mission) in its long-range plan for the first time.

<b>EXHIBIT 4</b> <b>The University of North Carolina</b> <b>Program Discontinuations in Long-Range Plans</b>		
<b>Long-Range Plan</b>	<b>Requests for Planning Authorizations Approved</b>	<b>Program Discontinuations</b>
1976-81	55	0
1977-82	30	32
1978-83	26	8
1980-85	31	10
1982-87	19	5
1984-89	30	33
1986-91	12	4
1992-97	<u>51</u>	<u>43</u>
Total	254	135

**Finding 6:** In the recent mission review, institutions focused on revising missions and new programs because the exercise was not designed to emphasize eliminations.

The plans institutions submitted included:

- Requests for 273 new programs
- An additional number of tentative program proposals

- Nine requests for institutional reclassifications, eight of which were requests to broaden missions
- Approximately 75 requests for various organizational and administrative changes

None of the institutions submitted plans to eliminate programs and only UNC–Asheville (UNC–A) requested a reclassification which narrowed its mission in terms of limiting future growth of graduate programs.

**Finding 7: The 1992–1997 long-range plan recognizes that North Carolina's economy and UNC programs will grow more slowly in the 1990s.**

The academic consultants who reviewed UNC's plan recognized that, under current economic conditions, North Carolina cannot afford to grant all the program requests, even those for which planning was authorized. The consultants assessed the ability of the institutions to support new programs against two factors of "major importance:" demographic projections and the probable state of the economy. Review of demographic projections lead the consultants to conclude that projections of a 21 percent increase in enrollment over the decade were "reasonable." Review of the economy lead the consultants to suggest that, until the economy returns to "normal," UNC could "sustain forward momentum, and thus some programmatic change, by some combination of increases in tuition, more vigorous efforts to raise money from private sources, and elimination of some programs having a lower priority than desired new programs."<sup>4</sup> (The topic of tuition increases is addressed in detail in a separate GPAC issue paper "Tuition and Fees.") Reiterating the last point, the consultants stated "It is reasonable to ask institutions seeking new programs to consider dropping certain programs which are of a lower priority."<sup>5</sup>

Despite the high number of authorizations for planning new programs, the new long-range plan for 1992–1997 has a different tone than the last plan. It recognizes that the State's economy will grow more slowly in the 1990s than it did in the 1980s; that "the State's current fiscal difficulties may not improve dramatically over the next few years;" and that "many competing and legitimate claims will continue to be made on North Carolina's General Fund revenues." In contrast, the long-range plan for 1986–1991 had assumed that General Fund revenues would continue to increase as they had done in the 1970s and the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

**Finding 8: The General Assembly, its members, or the Governor can influence the Board of Governors' decisions on program additions or eliminations.**

The General Assembly or the Governor's Office initiated establishment or expanded the

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<sup>4</sup>*Report to President C. D. Spangler, Jr., on the Missions of The University of North Carolina Campuses*, November 8, 1991, pp. 8–9.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid*, *Long-Range Planning: 1986–1991*, p. 63.

request of the Board of Governors for two major investments, the East Carolina University (ECU) School of Medicine and the College of Veterinary Medicine at NCSU, and for three smaller-scale programs:

- North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching at Western Carolina University (WCU)
- Piedmont Triad Research Institute at Winston-Salem State University (WSSU)
- North Carolina Arboretum

Some members of the General Assembly also lobbied the Board of Governors to not eliminate the nursing program at North Carolina Central University (NCCU).

The above indicates that the democratic process itself plays a role in the expansion of programs. Some argue that this is inappropriate and that the General Assembly, its members, or the Governor undermine the Board's ability to rationalize delivery of UNC services. Others argue that, since responsibility for initiating programs lies with institutions, the General Assembly, representing the State's interests, must step in when institutions fail to take the lead in identifying a priority.

**Finding 9: UNC has begun to use graduate centers, cooperative degree programs, and distance learning technology to help prevent program proliferation.**

**Graduate Centers.** UNC has four graduate centers through which host institutions offer programs taught by another institution's faculty. AY 1992-1993 programs are as follows:

- **Elizabeth City State University (ESCU):** Masters programs in elementary education, middle school education, and special education
- **UNC-A:** Masters programs in engineering, social work, nursing, and library science; doctoral program in adult and community college education
- **UNC-Charlotte (UNC-C):** Masters programs in public health, social work, library science, and vocational/industrial education; doctoral programs in education administration and engineering
- **WSSU:** Masters programs in business administration, elementary education, middle grades education, special education, and educational administration; intermediate program in elementary education

Graduate centers enable UNC to:

- Serve education and training needs throughout the State without funding